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ABSTRACT

It is not only possible, but also essential for students to be exposed to, to understand, and to personally experience equity and intercultural concepts and perspectives in the basic communication classroom. Incorporating students' discomfort at exploring equity and diversity into classroom discussions has proven effective in helping them examine the origin of their resistant attitude. Teachers can use the same basic lesson plans as before, and revise them according to new knowledge of multicultural issues by incorporating new examples. Topics and issues of equity can be employed in each of the following units of study covered in most basic communication courses: self-concept, perception, nonverbal communication, intercultural communication, language, listening, and relationships. These issues can be further developed in public speaking units or incorporated into a speaker-audience communication basic course. At the University of Kansas, efforts are being made to provide students with equity education through the incorporation of a culture-oriented approach to interpreting and sharing information. Teachers of basic communication courses can actively encourage their students to critically assess theoretical assumptions learned in view of their own cultural experience. (Twenty-one references are attached.) (RS)

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Multicultural Instruction: Strategies for Training Teaching Assistants to Incorporate Diverse Perspectives and Communication Styles into the Basic Communication Course

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Introduction

> If people who do not understand each other at least understand that they do not understand each other, then they understand each other better than when, not understanding each other, they do not even understand that they do not understand each other. (Gustav Ichheiser, qtd. in Smith and Otero, 1977)

A basic assumption in teaching used to be, and in some cases still is, that we are all the same; thus students should be treated equally. Yet, we are not all equals. No longer can we make the assumption that the typical American citizen is of European decent. In 1987, 30% of New York's residents were foreign born; Miami was two-thirds Hispanic; Washington, D.C. was 70% black; San Francisco was one third Asian; Detroit was 63% black; and new immigrants are settling all over the country (Copeland Griggs, 1987). In the next few years, diverse ethnic experiences will become a greater reality in classrooms throughout the U.S. By the year 2020 the number of U.S. residents who are Hispanic or non-white will have more than doubled, while the white population will be stagnant. By 2056 the "average" U.S. residents as defined by consensus statistics will trace his or her decent to Africa, Asia, the Hispanic world, the Pacific islands, Arabia - almost anywhere but white Europe (Henry III, 1990).

The increasing diversity of the student body has definite implications for education. We believe that all students of all ages can learn, and have the right to enjoy a quality, equitable education. An equitable education is possible when we realize that every single student is a unique individual who processes information in unique ways and is motivated by different teaching methods. It would be a

gross disservice to treat every student as if they were all the same, that is, equally. An equity education recognizes that the maintenance of diversity is crucial not only to a particular group's survival, but to the basic premises of a democratic society.

Equity Education

Equity education is defined by Rodriguez (1987) as "the fair and equal treatment of all members of our society who wish to participate in and enjoy the benefits of an education." Thus, as educators it is ours the role to provide students with positive reinforcement of such differences and a system responsive to the unique qualities that students can potentially contribute in the classroom and beyond. As stated by Henry III,

> The U.S. was created and continues to be redefined, primarily by voluntary immigration. This process has been one of the country's great strengths, infusing it with talent and energy. The "browning of America" offers tremendous opportunity for capitalizing anew on the merits of many peoples from different lands (1990).

The classroom is an optimum environment in which to acknowledge and nurture those merits. It would be wasteful not to recognize, respect, celebrate, and utilize the differences that every student has to offer. Educated thinking in the United States has progressively changed from a desire to make people alike (the melting pot metaphor) to a recognition and appreciation of diversity in our society (the tossed salad metaphor). Thus, it is up to educators to disseminate this knowledge and its implications. At the University of Kansas, and certainly at other colleges and universities in the U.S., classrooms are filled with people from

vastly different backgrounds, which can and should add variety and richness to our schools.

As communication educators it is unquestionably ours the responsibility to foster better understanding and promote cultural interactions among people of diverse backgrounds, by placing equity at the forefront of our agenda. Most colleges and universities in this country require a basic communication course for all of their students. Being able to reach practically every college student gives us a tremendous opportunity, and again a responsibility, to help make thousands of students who may not have previously come in contact with education based on an equity perspective experience and intercultural communication concepts aware of such an opportunity. As stated by Robinson (1990) "So many students are required (or similarly encouraged) to complete a basic course in communication that those who teach in Basic Course Programs assuredly have an impact on the lives and thinking of a large percentage of the freshmen and sophomore students throughout the country."

It is not only possible, but also essential for our students to be exposed to, to understand and to personally experience equity and intercultural concepts and perspectives in our communication classrooms. The reasons behind this statement are twofold: First, an equity perspective is essential because it is increasingly difficult for all people to successfully operate in the American multicultural society without an awareness of diversity and its impact for the workforce and for every day living. Secondly, an equity perspective is possible to experience, and therefore understand, because the material ordinarily covered in basic communication courses naturally lends itself to the inclusion of both a unit in

intercultural communication, and more importantly, an equity concept that would permeate every unit of the course, and other areas of communication.

The goals for incorporating an equity perspective into the basic course include: learning to reach one's potential by drawing on individual cultural experiences; to overcome fear of differences that leads to cultural misunderstanding and unhealthy conflict; to function effectively in a variety of cultural situations; to value cultural differences and view individuals as equitable rather than equal; and to understand the multicultural nation and interdependent world in which we live.

The Challenges for both Students and Instructors

The total equity concept begins with the instructor, who makes a conscious effort to offer a quality education to every student in his or her class, realizing that each student is a unique individual with a distinct history, goals and learning styles. As such each student can add a wealth of knowledge to the classroom. Encouraging students to explore and share their own backgrounds in class, allows others to increase their own self awareness. Even tentative attempts at articulating experiences, ideas and questions can contribute to an environment where diverse approaches become respected, validated and incorporated into the daily learning styles and life approaches of the students.

Such life approaches revolve around perceptions. Because we have unique frames of reference, we cannot perceive what is beyond those boundaries. The obvious implication is that we cannot perceive what we do not know or have not experienced at some level. We may select and organize information that is

compatible with our existing perceptual set and we interpret that information according to what is familiar to us. Our fields of experience are then, by definition, limited. The same applies to limited or negative experiences or impressions. In perceptual conditions such as these, multicultural perspectives cannot thrive. An intercultural, equity perspective is about enlarging those boundaries.

As communication professionals we can offer our students the opportunity to broaden an explore their perceptions of other cultures and perspectives within the safe environment of the classroom. Keeping in mind that students may not have previously had the opportunity to explore and learn the complexities involved in multicultural interactions, the Basic Course can address and widen implicit boundaries. Our societal rubric increasingly tends to stress the understanding of differences, while it often fails to train and encourage students about ways to do so. Modeling the kind of inclusive approach we need interpersonally, as well as societally, may be the great challenge of communication instruction.

It has been each of the authors' experience to encounter students who are resistant to the exploration of equity and diversity. Incorporating their discomfort into classroom discussions has proven to be extremely effective in helping them examine the origin of their resistant attitudes. Asking questions such as "Why might this make us uncomfortable?" or suggesting possible reasons for the discomfort can help create a more open communication climate. Value and world view exploration is another tool to address resistance and increase understanding of the root of their discomfort. In our experience, resistance

usually stems from low self-esteem, limited exposure to other cultures or frame of references, home socialization, peer pressure, fear, and/or strong reliance on mass mediated images. A discussion of these topics also helps to dispel the attitudes of resistant students.

It is important to remember that instructors, as well as students, have perceptual boundaries. Sometimes we are surprised when we meet our own resistance to an equity perspective. Often, intellectually, we understand and accept the need for multicultural perspectives and instruction. Yet, we may not find the time to investigate cultures and perspectives outside of the ones we know. This may be a subconscious or unconscious resistance strategy. Or, we may go so far, as to investigate other perspectives, but will interpret them from our own cultural framework. This may be a resistance strategy. We may not truly question or understand our own cultural orientations; thus, investigating others' becomes threatening to us. This is yet another resistance strategy. We are constantly encountering negative impulses within ourselves to cultures and perspectives that are different from our own experiences. Acknowledging that even we, as instructors, may have emotional resistance to the unfamiliar, is the first step in incorporating diverse perspectives into our courses. Examining our own ideas, feelings and ambiguities about others, freeing ourselves of guilt and accusation, "clearing the air with ourselves," so to speak, will help us to discover the rich and fertile areas of multiculturalism. Only then can we honestly share and explore multicultural issues with our students.

It is helpful to remind ourselves that students respect and appreciate an educated, but questioning instructor. It is useful to avoid the assumption and

presentation of knowledge as already completed. Since we, as instructors, will not pretend to have all the answers, but will be open and dedicated to exploring new possibilities and approaches, we will model critical thinking for our students. (Critical thinking is defined here as the intellectual probing and sorting through of ideas, concepts and issues, while emphasizing exploration, criticism and advocacy, in order to arrive at a personal understanding and position.) Our students, in turn, will become adept at addressing the difficulties and complexities to the study of communication through the process of grappling with ambiguous concepts and issues. Just as importantly, students can become adept at exercising the skills for coping and thriving in the multicultural environments that impact their daily lives.

We realize that it is not consistently easy to be an open and critical thinking instructor. Also, one cannot become an "instant" multicultural/equity expert overnight. These skills and perspectives need to develop over time and be continuously applied and nurtured. Keep in mind that we may not be practicing these skills solely for our students, but we are doing so for our own personal intellectual and scholarly enrichment. Getting out of our own "comfort zones" may prove to be a difficult but rewarding challenge. We can include our own new intercultural studies and experiences into the Basic Course. It may be second nature to reach for those lesson plans we have used in the past. Rather than discarding those plans, we advocate using the same basic plans, and revising them according to new knowledge of multicultural issues by incorporating new examples, and changing and evolving the plans with the context of society.

Using Equity Concepts in the Classroom Everyday

The notion of the basic communication course as a forum in which to explore the idea that diversity in race, religion, socioeconomic background, family lifestyles, color, sex, national origin, age and language is valuable and desirable. Basic communication instructors can easily weave this perspective, not only into the intercultural unit, but into every aspect of daily instruction. The following sections briefly outline how topics and issues of equity can be employed in each unit covered in most basic communication courses.

The initial unit of the course, "Self-concept," lays the groundwork for an equity perspective. By first helping students to recognize and appreciate their own uniqueness, and find worth in their own individuality, they can then begin to respect and appreciate the differences of others. Cultural awareness begins with the individual awareness of one as a cultural being, as the ability to recognize one's own self-concept and culture is fundamental for becoming aware of the diversity of ideas and practices to be found in human societies and how these ideas and practices compare (Smith and Otero, 1977). Keeping our students' differences in mind, we need to assist them in all areas of the basic communication course, in a way that acknowledges and capitalizes on their individuality. When we do this, each student can begin to experience equity.

A central theme of the "Self-concept" unit is that no two people are exactly alike. As instructors, we need to live this philosophy throughout the semester, reminding ourselves that students are not identical vessels, and that our roles as educators should not be defined as mere "foundations of knowledge." Instead of opening, filling and closing their minds, we, as truly effective educators, need to

teach students to think for themselves by exercising critical thinking-- particularly in this first unit, as students reflect on who they are. Indeed, during the semester, communication instructors will teach their students the content of interpersonal communication and public speaking, but we also have the responsibility to personalize the educational experience for each student by challenging them to think critically, ask questions and not lose sight of their their own thoughts and feelings. This is equitable education.

Once students are sensitive to their own individuality, through the "Self-concept" unit, they are ready to explore the thoughts and ideas of others, as presented in the "Perception" unit. An equity perspective, or cultural awareness, is the development of sensitivity to cultural differences. It involves more than learning about the food and customs of a particular group. Developing sensitivity to differences means examining our own perceptions and then "trying-on" new perspectives to fit different cultural contexts through activities and discussions. A variety of readings, class exercises and self-exploration can help students become more aware of the human tendency to stereotype and hold perceptions about various groups. Students can learn that, as members of particular cultural groups, we tend to accept the standard methods of doing things without question, and that we may not even be aware of the powerful influence of our own culture. As Oliver (1989) suggests, we live our lives wearing cultural filters which affect how we perceive reality. This unit points out that we tend to assume that all individuals communicate the same way and that meaning is somehow automatically shared. Students may then realize that this cannot be the case when one considers that even individuals of similar backgrounds respond differently to

similar situations. When considering diverse cultural orientations, students will become aware that we can never expect meaning to be shared automatically. The "Perception" unit can help students become more receptive to a decision on cultural issues, by providing them a means for examining what we believe and why we believe it.

In the"Nonverbal" unit, students learn that if one does not understand a person and their own perceptions of what is said or conveyed through body language and facial gestures (kinesics); vocal inflections and vocal quality (paralanguage); and time conceptualizations and space configurations, effective communication cannot be established. In view of the fact that 85-90 percent of communication is nonverbal, this unit will help students understand the importance of this aspect of communication in establishing meaning, as well as the notion that nonverbal systems are culture-bound. It is a faulty assumption, for instance, to walk into a room filed with people of different cultural backgrounds and expect to communicate as effectively in one style versus a number of different ones (qtd. in Copeland Griggs, 1987). Such an attitude is likely to be perceived as arrogant by members of those groups, when in fact it could be explained as lack of information and cultural awareness, both of which can be provided through communication studies.

The next unit of the course might be the "Intercultural Communication" unit, which is typically not required of instructors to teach, but which is nonetheless an intrinsic aspect of Interpersonal Communication. The need for such an realization is reflected on a 1989 review of approximately a dozen textbooks on the basic communication course published in the previous two years

that yielded only one book as including a unit in intercultural communication (Assuncion-Lande, 1989.) A key concept in the process of intercultural communication is the notion of similarities and differences. Appreciation of, and focus on differences becomes a necessary step to intercultural communication and to the ultimate identification of similarities. By failing to identify and appreciate differences at the outset results in a lack of awareness that jeopardize effective communication. The underlying assumption of the intercultural unit is that it is particularly suitable to one of the main goals of Basic Communication courses, which is to enable students to be competent in a variety of situations.

Because "Language" incorporates perception, in this unit students are given an opportunity to assess the implications of the great diversity of perspectives in the U.S., not only through the languages and dialects spoken but also through the English language usage and the various associations traced to specific cultural groups. Classroom exercises such as attempting to communicate with a person speaking in "C.B. talk" or prison jargon" can bring to light the effort we each need to make when speaking and listening, even in using the same language, in order to understand and be understood. The unit can additionally present information regarding the fact that some aspects of our language environment affect us in negative ways, retarding the development of the self and thereby limiting the individual's contributions to the growth of society. These negative aspects include racism, sexism, and ageism, all of which are prevalent in our language environment (Smith and Williamson). Stimulating discussions can evolve out of the inequities that those issues present. Questions can be asked of students such as, "What are the implications of referring to a woman as 'chick' a

'bitch,' or a 'broad?' "Why is it common to refer to women as 'girls' but not to men as 'boys' and what are the implications? What is the origin of the terms 'faggot,' (bundle of sticks used to ignite fires at witch hunts), 'mulatto' (cross bred mule) and "Is there a difference between a 'nigger,' a 'jungle bunny' and an 'oreo'?" "How do we use language to perpetuate inequities and promote respect and understanding for all citizens, regardless of their backgrounds? What do we mean when we say that language is power?" As put by Davis (1990), sexist and racist words and expressions are "charged with sentiment," and are often "designed to relegate people." Thus, one cannot "just change language, but the realities behind the language." The discussion generated by such questions sets the ground for an understanding of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis relating language to perception and culture and help reinforce the issue of equity.

The "Listening" unit complements the language unit well by pointing out that, one of the most essential skills of being a competent communicator is not only knowing how to be an effective speaker, but how to be an effective listener as well. Instructors can serve as role-models to their students by practicing latency and by responding to every comment offered by students. Teaching students skills of empathic and active listening invites equity, for it requires a person to put aside stereotypes and prejudices and to listen totally with her heart, mind and soul to every person with whom she/he comes in contact, regardless of her color, shape, or size. Although this is an activity that demands much energy of students, who tend to be inexperienced listeners, it is also one that will be worth the effort by providing them with rewards through an acquired greater understanding of oneself and others.

In the "Relationship" unit, students can encounter still more rewards of equity through learning how relationships add dimension to our lives and help form a sense of who we are. A discussion of the art of trusting can be useful for students, especially for those hesitant of establishing relationships with persons from diverse backgrounds. In recognizing that trust comes through trusting yourself and the willingness to take risk, students will gain an understanding of the fact that equality begins with them. It is their responsibility to take the initiative to establish the relationship--to reach out to someone from a background other than their own. Again, students will find that the rewards of friendship and self-discovery far outweigh the costs of taking a chance. Gender differences and the nature of the culture-bound designation of roles should also be discussed not only as a means of gaining insight into other cultures but into one's own as well.

The above units offer a strong foundation for an equity perspective, which can be further developed in the "Public Speaking" units of the Hybrid Basic Course or incorporated into a Speaker-Audience Communication (Public Speaking) Basic course.

Public Speaking

The "Public Speaking" units can further drive home the idea that diversity needs to be accepted in a positive way in the spirit of celebration rather than threat. Although teachers often offer suggestions and specific guidelines for speech giving, students should be encouraged to express themselves as individuals and be warned that the Western approach to public speaking competence represents one in many. We can make our students aware that mainstream American culture has beliefs about public speaking which differ from those of other international cultures, as

well as from those of co-cultures within the United States (Greene, et al.) It is in doing this that we can assist our students in gaining further awareness of their own cultural heritage, in order that they may more effectively identify the public speaking principles that may require more effort for them to learn, and why those difficulties may be present. Because speech topics are diverse and often controversial, we can remind students that their cultural heritage may affect their responses as they listen to classmates' speeches, and that they need to try to keep an open mind as they listen to views or argument styles which may differ from their own. Also, we can promote an equity perspective by informing students that most of the audiences they will address in basic course classes and for the rest of their lives will be culturally diverse in terms of gender, heritage, and religion; we should instruct our students, therefore, to be sensitive to these differences as they research, organize, and deliver their speeches, choosing language and examples which are appropriate for the audience (Greene et al.).

Finally, in "Public Speaking" students are given opportunity to express themselves on issues about equity by using equity ideas or issues as speech topics. A discussion on ethical issues, in particular in the "Persuasion" segment, should be emphasized as multicultural education deals with values and attitudes. Students should be encouraged to identify their own values and understand that persuading does not mean imposing those on others. Thus, students should learn how to make choices based on expressed reasoning, problem-solving, decision-making, and try to understand how these strategies may vary cross-culturally.

Other areas of communication could also greatly benefit from the incorporation of an equity and intercultural perspective. The rapidly changing

workforce, for instance, will have a tremendous impact in the study of Organizational Communication. Theories need to be revised to allow for "examine realistic organizational problems...which mirror reality" (Kreps and Leiderman, qtd. in Foeman, 1989). The key in allowing for equitable perspectives in organizations is to consider the *process* by which recommendations are made (Foeman, 1989). Such an analysis is crucial in helping students uncover the cultural assumptions behind these and more carefully assess decision and sense-making.

The role of mass communicators has also changed significantly, as mass mediators increasingly require knowledge and sophistication in communicating with and about social systems and cultures different from their own. According to Starck and Kruckeberg (1990), North American mass communication educators can help students prepare for careers by providing leadership and resources in at least four general areas: curricula in which students can learn about other cultures and other countries; international internships; study abroad; and internationalization of pre-professional student organizations. Such recommendations are valuable in view of recent profound changes affecting social, economic, and political structures in a worldwide level. These changes already have had a great impact through the differing perspectives that those changes bring into a particular cultural context. An intercultural approach to the study of media will not enrich the field of communication by offering students the opportunity to voice their own perceptions and unique perspectives on mass communications.

Instructional Methods

At the University of Kansas, efforts are being made to provide students with

equity education through the incorporation of a culture-oriented approach to interpreting and sharing information. Dialogue-lecture techniques, small face-to-face group discussion (Rich, 1974), documentary videotapes, guest speakers, simulations, critical incidents, and out-of-class interpersonal interactions constitute some of the instructional resources that can be used to supplement a multicultural/equity education and provide students with a stimulating learning experience. Other methods include the incorporation of classes that maintain the objectives of the Basic Course while striving to meet the needs of a diverse student body (Eort, 1991), including those of handicapped students (Williamson-Inge, 1990).

In a survey measuring the needs of special student populations and how their needs were being addressed in the Basic Course, Pelias (1991) found out that the second major problem in doing so was identified as being "difficulty in gaining information relating to how to best work with special needs students." An equity perspective is a potentially valuable tool in providing a frame of reference to instructors and addressing such lack of information. An important aspect of an equity education is the selection of curricular materials and visual displays that include, rather than omit, members of various groups and portray those in a positive manner--free of gender, race, and handicap stereotypes (Sluter, 1988).

Conclusion

It is in showing students that one of the most useful skills to improve communication constitutes the accepting and appreciating of the diversity of

people, their backgrounds, and their beliefs, thoughts, and ideas, that resides one of the most valuable tools educators can offer. As teachers we can show students, by using our own example in the classroom, that multicultural education through equity can be a reality. Most importantly, we can actively encourage students to critically assess theoretical assumptions learned in view of their own cultural experience. As soon as students become aware of the possible consequences of unresponsiveness to cultural differences, they may increasingly become more capable, pro-active agents to affect change themselves by meeting the challenges of an increasingly multicultural environment.

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